

EVALUATION OF BUDGET REQUEST

Full-Time Kindergarten

The Office of Public Instruction is requesting \$25 million for the 2009 biennium to provide full ANB funding for students enrolled in Full-Time Kindergarten programs.

Currently, the State of Montana funds students enrolled in kindergarten at one-half the rate of students enrolled in grades 1-6. This request is to fund schools that provide Full-Time Kindergarten with full-time ANB funding for their kindergarten students. The program will be voluntary to both parents and school districts, but to receive the additional funding, the school district must offer Full-Time Kindergarten. The program is voluntary to schools because some school districts may not have the facility space to immediately implement a Full-Time Kindergarten program.

Justification

Nationwide, 63 percent of 5 years olds attend Full-Time Kindergarten. Studies have shown sustained academic, social, and financial benefits of students who attend Full-Time Kindergarten. Students enrolled in Full-Time Kindergarten show greater progress in literacy, math and general learning skills than their counter parts who attend half-time programs. They have higher scores on achievement tests, and they show significant gains in social and emotional development and reduced behavioral problems. Over a lifetime they have elevated adult literacy rates, higher monthly earnings at age 27, increased percentages of home ownership, and higher levels of schooling completed. The financial benefits are also well documented. Many schools are able to reduce pupil transportation costs when they eliminate extra bus routes for half-day kindergarten students. Full-Time Kindergarten lowers the number of high-cost students by way of fewer grade retentions and special education placements. There is also long term savings in reduced number of social services and correctional system needs.

GOALS

It is the mission of the Office of Public Instruction to improve teaching and learning through communication, collaboration, advocacy, and accountability to those we serve.

The five agency-wide goals of the Office of Public Instruction are:

- Goal 1: Support schools so that all students can achieve high standards
- Goal 2: Assess and communicate the quality and achievements of K-12 education
- Goal 3: Provide access to and management of information and data related to K-12 school improvement
- Goal 4: Deliver quality instruction through professional development
- Goal 5: Support accountability and improvement in all Montana schools

This proposal supports one of the five agency-wide goals of the Office of Public Instruction.

- ✓ Support schools so that all students can achieve high standards

Currently, Montana has a significant achievement gap between our low-income and higher income students. In addition, our dropout rate for American Indian students is three times that of white students. Closing this achievement gap and lowering the dropout rate are top priorities of the Office of Public Instruction. Full-Time Kindergarten is a proven way to address these problems and get kids achieving at the level of their peers early in their education. This will also impact our at-risk students by increasing their academic performance and reducing the need for retentions. If a child isn't reading at grade level by the 3rd grade it is very difficult and expensive

to catch them up in later grades. Expanding the existing half-time programs to Full-Time Kindergarten will play an important role in closing the achievement gap and lowering the dropout rate in this state.

Performance Criteria

The long term impact of Full-Time Kindergarten will take years to appear in statistics. However, we can expect shorter term gains in achievement and test scores to appear within four years, by the time the first cohort of full-time kindergarten students reach the end of third grade.

If funded, Full-Time Kindergarten will begin in a majority of Montana schools beginning in the 2007-2008 school year. Third grade is the first time students in Montana take the Criterion-Referenced Test (CRT). As mentioned previously, third grade is also the grade in which studies show that if a student is not reading at grade level than it is nearly impossible and very expensive for them to catch up in later grades. Therefore, the OPI believes that the third grade is an appropriate year to measure the impact on performance of the Full-Time Kindergarten program.

The 2005-2006 CRT Reading test shows that the percentage of Montana third grade students who are proficient or advanced in reading is 81%. **PERFORMANCE TARGET:** By the 2010 – 2011 school year, the percentage of third grade students scoring proficient or advanced will improve by five percentage points and raise Montana's overall performance to 86% of third grade students performing at proficient or advanced.

Milestones

Beginning in the 2007-2008 school year, schools that chose to provide Full-Time Kindergarten will be provided full-funding ANB for each student who enrolls in a full-time kindergarten program.

FTE

No new state FTE will be required for the implementation of Full-Time Kindergarten. Since this is an expansion of an existing program, the OPI's School Finance Division will have the responsibility of implementation by adjusting the rate of funding for those schools that choose to participate.

Initially there will be increased work load for the first year of implementation for two Financial Specialists and a Programmer.

Funding

The Montana Constitution states that "the legislature shall provide a basic system of free quality public elementary and secondary schools". It is the state's obligation to fund its share of Montana's education system, and the OPI is requesting funding from the state's general fund to implement Full-Time Kindergarten.

Obstacles

Some school districts may not be able to take advantage of this expanded program because of staff, budget, or facility limitations. Currently, schools may be running two half time programs using the same educator and the same room. Adding Full-Time Kindergarten may require additional FTE and classroom space; these financial obstacles may be more than the new funding would cover. In addition, there may not be a qualified FTE to fill the position. Those schools that cannot provide Full-Time Kindergarten would be not be able to reap the academic benefits of this proven program.

Risk

Without Full-Time Kindergarten we are not addressing the immediate needs of Montana's children to get them the jumpstart they need on their education. Montana's disadvantaged students enter Kindergarten already behind their classmates. Without leveling the playing field with Full-Time Kindergarten, we are neglecting our constitutional duty to "develop the full educational potential of each person" and guarantee "equality of educational opportunity...to each person of the state."